

SOCIAL STRUCTURE : TOTEMISTIC ELEMENTS

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this in a strict way, and when certain situations arise they may eat from a brass dish without offence. The same applies in the case of the Kathautiyas.

Russell and Hiralal¹ are supposed to have found traces of totemism among the Kols, but as previously noted, it is clear that they have made a mistake in the case of the Kathariyas. They list certain "totemistic septs" in Mandla. They note that the Bargaiyan sept is really named after the village of Bargaon, that the sept connects its name with the bar or banyan tree (*Ficus indica*) and is said to revere it. This tree, however, is generally revered by Kols. Some of the sept's uses and taboos of the tree are mentioned in their article. The second sept, the Kathautia has the explanation that we have given, except it is reported that the sept reveres the tiger and keeps Bagheshwar Deo,² the tiger god, on a little platform on the veranda. We found no trace of this among the Kathautiyas interviewed. The third is the Kathariya sept, of which we have already spoken and where we believe the authors have gone astray. Fourthly, "The name of the Mudia or Mudrunda sept is said to mean shaven head, but they apparently revere the white *kumhra* or gourd, perhaps because it has some relation to the shaven head. They give the white gourd to a woman on the third day after she has borne a child, and her family do not eat this vegetable for three years."³ Fifthly, the Kumraya sept is said to revere the brown *kumhra*. Again, the Bhuwar sept is named after *bhu* or *bhumi* and its members must never sleep on cots, always on the ground. We found no trace of this belief. "Other septs are Nathunia, a nose ring; Karpafia, a kind of grass; and Binjhar, from a tribe of that name."⁴ Russell and Hiralal do not state whether there are exogamic tendencies in connection with these septs or not. Totemism however, is a very complex phenomenon and differs widely even among the Mundas. There is apparently no single criterion: "Exogamy may or may not be coupled with the other features, totemistic taboos may be dissociated from a totemistic name for the group practising them; descent from the totem may or may not be postulated; and so forth."⁵ Lowie goes on to discuss Goldenweiser's and Fraser's theories of totemism and finds them inadequate to explain the totemistic phenomena. "Only confusion can result from envisaging what is disparate under a single head."⁶ The

¹ Russell and Hiralal, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. III, p. 510, 511.

² See index: Tiger.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

⁵ Lowie, R. H., *Primitive Society*, p. 140.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

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Rautiya Kols have a strong taboo in relation to the horse, but repeated enquiries have failed to establish any totemistic connection, although it may exist. In view of these facts and in the light of these investigations it seems that totemism as such is apparently a negligible factor in the lives of the Kols of Central India. There are, it may be, certain traces of it kept alive by tradition, but its real significance has been lost. The unit of social organization turns out to be the family within the endogamous *kurhi*.

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CHAPTER IV

BIRTH, CHILDHOOD, PUBERTY

For the Kols there are certain very obvious turning points of life, and at such times Kols believe that evil is present, ready to render the outcome of events unfavourable. To Kols the anxiety is not merely one born of a physical crisis but goes deeper into their consciousness, for at such times favourable supernatural aid must be secured or the evil spirits will triumph over them. Hence at these turning points there are certain rites and ceremonies which must be observed and recourse should not be had to some newer unknown and untried method. Kols are unable to give a rational account of why they perform these rites; as far as they are concerned it is just the custom. Though in many cases the customs may have been adopted from Hinduism, it was so long ago that Kols are now altogether unconscious of it. It should be remembered, therefore, that many of the things described in this connection will also be found true of the village folk all over this part of Central India. An attempt has been made by long and patient enquiry to find out what the Kols themselves do on these important occasions, but we have not sought to compare them with other groups in this regard.

BIRTH CUSTOMS: Pregnancy. The pregnant mother is not considered unclean and there are no particular taboos placed upon her. She is allowed to go about her regular work and do all cooking and household duties without restriction. She may eat what she likes and there are no foods which she must avoid other than those a Kol never uses. She should be careful, however, not to go near places where *bhuts* and other evil spirits are known to lurk, they might attack her and as a result cause a miscarriage. When the woman comes to know that she is pregnant the matter is taken to the family goddess—*devi*—who is usually resident in one corner of the house and she is promised that she will receive an offering if she protects the mother and the unborn babe for the full time of pregnancy. After delivery, or often shortly before if all has gone well, the family will present to the *devi* the particular things that they had promised her. This may be an animal such as a goat, pig or chicken, or just a cocoanut. Again, the simple *hom* offering or fire sacrifice is common. This consists of an oblation of clarified butter (*ghi*) placed in the fire burning before the *devi*, the anointing of the wall with vermilion (*sandur*) and the

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CHAPTER VII

DEATH AND ITS ATTENDANT CEREMONIES

761 Death is an event which every Kol knows must be faced relatively early in life. One does not find a high proportion of aged Kols. Among many primitive people death is usually ascribed to evil influences, but among the Kols this does not seem to be the common belief. While they believe that some deaths may be ascribed to evil influences they do not believe that all are caused that way. On the whole they take quite a natural view of the phenomenon. What the gods will that they do. Death also may be due only to natural causes or carelessness and no hidden malevolent cause is assumed. Death is usually deserved, for as one sows he also reaps. Hence an early death may be justly merited and caused by corrupt living. The Kols do not seem to be as superstition ridden as many groups are, yet we found indications that they hold the general local village point of view. On the whole there is a wholesome attitude toward the supernatural—the world is not altogether evil.

763 THE APPROACH OF DEATH. When it is clear that a person is about to die there are certain things which ought to be done. It was found that the custom of bringing a cow to the bedside of the dying man is known and is occasionally practiced. The dying man is asked to take hold of her tail. This will help him to get to heaven, for the cow is now considered an offering to God, and it is held that by holding the tail the dying man makes this offering. If available, he is also made to drink a little Ganges water which is regarded as the very best of drinks to give him at that hour. Failing this, a sip of water in which gold has been washed is efficacious. Gold is considered an incarnation of God and a symbol of purity. Again, some ordinary water into which some ground up leaves of the *tulasi* plant (*Ocimum sanctum*) have been thrown is advantageous. Such drinks are said to purify the dying person and prepare the soul for its flight to other worlds. Hindu influences are apparent.

Usually the person who is dying is placed on the ground to expire. The body is placed on the ground so that there may be close contact with Mother Earth. In some places it is said that a man may just as well die

[162] ¹ This holds for primitive tribes in general, although any statement of age is unreliable. The 1931 census figures show that among the Kols there were only 100 men and 99 women per mile over forty. Other tribes show the following: Gond 184 men and 185 women; Maria 102 and 97; Baiga 143 and 140. Hindus rank higher—171 and 173 for Brahmans and 190 and 183 for Kumbis. *Census of India, 1931, xii: 1, p. 121.*

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CHAPTER VIII

RELIGION AND ATTENDANT FESTIVALS

771 Life apart from religion is unthinkable to the Kols. It has already been seen that their social activities are permeated with religion and magic. Nothing is done without reference to the all-pervading mysterious powers, for all of life's events may be traced to their activities, and it is fatal to be out of harmony with them. It is the duty of each individual as well as the whole community to keep the spirits contented and propitious so that they will aid them against the evils of life brought on by demons such as *dhuts*, *churels*, and the like. 772 The Kols endow these spiritual beings with a form of personality; they have an objective existence, and are able to make or mar the future. Consequently, they cannot be ignored, and must be propitiated in divers ways.

The religious rites and tribal regulations of the Kols are all intended to strengthen a totalitarian conception of life. To their type of mind life cannot be broken up into compartments and there is thus no clear line of demarcation between economic, social and religious spheres. These three are really one, and their harmony and stability must be maintained, and to break it at one point is to break it as a whole. Anything which may seem to change the existing order of things is dreaded by people such as we are studying.

776 DIVINE ORDERS. The Kols of Central India hold that there are certain Divine Orders which ought to be respected and acknowledged, even though all are not implored. Here are some typical examples:

- (1) Bhagawan—the Supreme One.
- (2) Bhagavati—a mediator as Kherrmai and others.
- (3) Shardamai of the "Seven Sisters."
- (4) Kalimai—really one of the "Seven Sisters."

Another group:

- (1) Bhagawan.
- (2) Shivari—the Mother of all Kols.
- (3) Shardamai of the "Seven Sisters."
- (4) Kherrmai—a mediator.

Again:

- (1) Bhagawan.
- (2) Bhagavati—a mediator.

776 and *devis*. For example, it is stated that he is able to send certain
782 diseases such as smallpox and cholera. But while he may send them,
[753] it is of no use to ask him to banish them; for this a lesser deity like
Khermal should be invoked. It is only if she fails, and if it seems
necessary to avert further distress, that they will call to him and promise
him that if he will save them they will send for a *pandit* and have a
katha in the name of Bhagawan. It is our opinion that there is little
trace, if any, of a higher conception of Bhagawan among the Kols of
this area.

776 The contacts of the Kols with higher Hinduism is feeble and
177 markedly inconsistent. Both Vishnuite and Sivaite elements are
inextricably mixed, and while Rama, Krishna and other *avatars* of
Vishnu are known and stories about them are related, they have
nevertheless almost no significance in actual religious ceremonies.
Again, while the phallic symbols characteristic of Sivaite are not
[782] often used by Kols, nor Sivaite temples frequented, nevertheless Kali,
the wife of Siva, is propitiated. Taken as a whole, the Kol worship
has in it but little of adoration. It is mostly a matter of propitiation.
When asked why they do not worship in certain near-by Hindu temples,
the answer has been that their fathers never worshipped there and
why should they.

● 771 NATURE WORSHIP. In connection with the worship of the
776 Supreme One, mention should be made of the relation of the Kols to
821 the forces of nature, so often deified in Hindu thought. Primitive
peoples all seem to have respect for the powers of the sky, air and
earth; and while in the case of the Kols it appears to have lost its
primitive expression, and become Hindu in ideology, it is nevertheless
apparent in their thought.

The Sun. The Sun is usually thought of as a great God, a
beneficent deity who is the source of all heat and light. It is stated
that their forefathers worshipped the sun, and that they do also,
but on examination this worship turns out to be very formal. The
village shrine often faces the rising sun, but no image of the sun is ever
made. He is often called *Suryanarayana*, Sun-God.

[514] No disrespect should be shown to the sun. When going to the
fields for a call of nature, the Kol never squats without first ascertain-
ing where the sun is, and as far as possible keeps it always to his right.
The back, the front, and especially the left hand should never be
toward it at such times.

The Moon. Some Kols consider the moon a goddess, while
others do not seem to regard it in the category of deity at all. They

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say there is nothing one does in relation to it. The moon is thought of as feminine and the sun as masculine, for the moon is cold and the sun is hot. There are a number of beliefs and superstitions concerning the moon. It is good luck to see the new moon before any stars are out in the sky. On seeing the new moon for the first time a Kol may either tear a corner off one of his garments and cast it toward the moon, or may hold up the garment toward the moon, saying: "Take these old clothes and give me new ones." It is usual at the same time to take worn-out pieces of cloth or just rags, and hang them on the tree near the house. This attracts the goddess of torn clothes, Chithra devi, who will bring good luck and in the course of time new garments.

The moon is thought to have no evil influences upon men folk and therefore is not feared by them. Women, however, are likely to be affected by the moon and as far as possible should avoid it. Pregnant women especially should not expose themselves to the moon as it is liable to cause a miscarriage or a deformed infant.

The time of an eclipse of either the sun or the moon is a time of special precaution and worship. The Kols say that the sun is devoured by a giant whom they call Dhrubh. The concept that a demon devours the sun is common all over India, but the usual Hindu concept is that it is swallowed by one named Rahu, the "looser or seizer." The Kol story goes that both the sun and the moon at one time borrowed something from Dhrubh, whom Kols call the brother of Indra. This debt must be repaid, and if at any time the sun or the moon is not able to pay on the debt, it is attacked by Dhrubh who begins to devour it. He never quite does so, however and vomits it up, as there is still money owing and payments must go on. Others say that Dhrubh is merely jealous of the moon because she is worshipped and adored while he is not. Therefore he attacks either the sun or the moon. One should bathe at the time of an eclipse. During such a time women should remain inside for it is a very dangerous season especially if they are with child. The men may go out to bathe, sing and beat the drums. Wicked spirits are abroad, and unless the women are protected by charms, they are liable to be attacked. After the release of the sun or moon, the women go out to bathe. The Nerbudda is the best place in Central India, but any tank or river will do if one cannot go so far. After bathing they should give some alms to Basors who will be waiting near by. They give to no others.

At home no food is prepared or eaten during the eclipse. Nothing cooked is left in the house, and all uncooked food should be carefully protected so as not to become a prey to the evil spirits. All the earthen vessels used in connection with food and water should be thrown out

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771 and new ones brought in. Metal vessels are not affected. Hindu
776 influences are apparent.

821 *Rivers.* The Kols say that there are but two rivers in India
823 which are really sacred, the Ganges and the Nerbudda. They put
778 the Ganges in the first place. Like most Hindus, Kols believe that
it is good to bathe in these rivers and that to do so will help to wash
away sin and give one merit. Kols in the vicinity of Jubbulpore
frequently go to the Nerbudda, but seldom to the Ganges.

771 *GODS AND GODDESSES WORSHIPPED BY KOLS.* The worship
776 to which the Kols really give themselves is not that of the gods of the
Hindu pantheon, nor the forces or the powers of nature, but rather
of the village deities—*deotas* and *devis*—who are intimately connected
with their daily life and outlook. The majority of these deities are
female, and it is such deities that really count. They are termed
"mothers," and many have *mai* meaning "mother", attached to their
name. The male deities are called *babas*, "fathers"; or *deos*, "god-
lings."

776 *The Kol Pantheon.* Among Hindus the Supreme Being is
171 worshipped as Vishnu by the Vaishnavas and as Siva by the Saivas.
Others who worship the Supreme deity exclusively as a female principle
are called Saktas. The wives of Vishnu or Siva may be worshipped as
Lakshmi and Parvati, thus introducing the female principle. Neverthe-
less the *devi* is secondary to the *deva*. In the case of Sakti worship,
the Devi is made supreme and the absolute Brahma from whom
Brahma, Vishnu and Siva proceed, can do nothing without her
activity. This form of religion is seen particularly in Tantra and
Sakta Hinduism.

The goddess of the Saktas may be called by the general term
"Devi," but is worshipped in many forms. Various aspects of her
life or achievements are remembered under different names, and she
even may assume the form of a male. The worship of Devi is usually
associated with Siva, rather than Vishnu, and many of the concomitants
of Saivism are associated with her worship.

776 From the evidence that follows, which is largely from the lips of
171 Kols, it would appear that the Devi principle is the main factor at
work in the Kols' idea of deity. Khermai is occasionally given an
all-inclusive aspect. Bhagavati is essentially Devi. She has "six
sisters" who are really forms of herself.¹ Kols have never been

¹ "In all parts of South India the seven sisters are the most prominent among
Dravidian deities." —Elmore, W. T., *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, p. 19. He
names the following as examples, though he notes their names vary from place to place:
Polaramma, Ankamma, Muthyalamma, Dilli Polai, Bangaramma, Mathamma and Renuka.

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the presence of the spirit is considered injurious to the interests of what is in hand, it should be driven away so that it may not interfere. The "spirit squaring" aspect is perhaps the more common in the case of the deities. They are to be kept happy, propitiated, and given a place to rest. If neglected, they become ill-disposed toward the village. Most of these deities are pleased with bloody sacrifices but one does not find, in this section, the orgies such as are prominent in the worship of the village gods of South India.¹

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THE VILLAGE PRIEST—THE PANDA. The religious life of the Kol is connected, as has been seen, with the lesser deities and evil spirits. Worship centres at the village shrine and is usually directed and controlled by the village priest. While the Brahmin priest may be called on occasions which require his presence, such as weddings, name-giving, Bhagawan worship or the like, he has nothing to do with the actual worship at the village shrine. His presence has a social validity rather than a religious one. The worship of the village *devis* is not reserved for a particular class. Any man who seems to have the proper credentials may become the village priest and is called a *panda*. The *panda* is usually a Kol, and while they respect the Baiga priests, the latter are usually called only for magical purposes; it is customary for a Kol *panda* to perform all that is necessary for the religious life of the community. It is usual to find but one recognized *panda* in a village, but every village does not necessarily have such a man. It may be necessary for one village to call a *panda* from another village. But the line of demarcation is so uncertain that, if such a priest is not able to come, any one of the elderly Kols may temporarily perform the function of a *panda*. The *pandas* do not confine themselves exclusively to their religious duties, and often they are found digging, cutting grass, breaking stones and performing all that the average Kol does.

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In a certain sense the office is hereditary, although the son must prove his worth before he is recognized. It is usual to find that the officiating *panda's* father was the village priest before him, or a priest at some other village. The son is trained by the father, and at the time of the *dams* when the father is possessed of the *devi*, the son is the assistant and keeps the shrine in order and the elements propitious as long as his father is in the trance. If the *panda* has no eligible son, it is the one whom "the *devi* selects" who becomes his successor. At any rate the son has to pass tests which will indicate whether or not he is the *devi's* choice.

¹ Whitehead, Henry, *The Village Gods of South India*.

CHAPTER IX

MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

The Kols are fundamentally a primitive tribe, even though they have been for many years in contact with Hindu thought and life. It will be found therefore that they have outlooks which are properly termed animistic. This does not necessarily imply that their thought forms are simple and that a 'primitive' people have a 'primitive' outlook. Kol thought, though not philosophic, is complex and involved, and has behind it a long history. These beliefs are not limited to 'primitive' people either, but are shared with other groups living about them, and extend up into the very fabric of the thinking of intelligent Indiana. 177 771 812

There are certain forces which are opposing this point of view, such as education, travel, books, and modern inventions, to say nothing of contacts with higher Hinduism and the political movements of the day. There are many ancient institutions such as caste, the authority of the Brahmins, and idolatry, which are being questioned at the present time; and these questionings have their repercussions among the villages and tend toward a sophisticated attitude toward many of the beliefs described below.

There are other forces which aid in the maintenance of animistic outlooks: ignorance of what is going on tends toward the *status quo*; women among the Kols are universally illiterate and are the stronghold of the old ways. Many a Kol says that he puts on charms for his wife's sake, but adds that he really does not believe that they do much good. Custom is another force very difficult to move. It is very strong over India and its persistence, in spite of knowledge to the contrary, is a thing which strikes an observer. Belief may change, but custom, though rationalized, remains as before. [562 212]

A word of caution should be uttered concerning generalities in regard to animistic thought. There are few, if any, perfectly consistent generalizations which may be made concerning Kol beliefs and outlooks. For example, when the spirit world is described, one should not immediately conclude that *all* Kols enter into these concepts, any more than one should judge that all westerners regard the number thirteen with superstitious fear.

THE SPIRIT WORLD. To the average Kol all things animate and inanimate may be the abode of spirits of one sort or another. 776

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[177] It has been noted that one of the evidences of the tribal groups becoming Hinduized was the abandonment of forest life and migratory methods of cultivation and the settling down in villages. This the Kols seem to have done in a large part of Central India. Today they generally live in small hamlets of their own, and oftener than not these are attached to larger villages. They appear to have totally abandoned *Burwar* cultivation, the method of burning off some of the jungle, planting seeds in the scratched ashes, and moving on to some newly burnt place the following year. The Government has either stopped this altogether, or limited the area in which this can be done. [166] Most of the primitive tribes used to practise this. Even now though they live in villages there is still considerable seasonal migration. The villages near Jubbulpore are almost deserted in late March and April when the wheat is being harvested throughout the Nerbudda Valley. On our way to Rewa State at the end of April we passed hundreds of Kols along the Old Deccan road returning northwards to their homes in Rewa. They had their wives and new-born children with them, and were carrying their meagre possessions slung on the ends of bamboo poles across the shoulders. See plate XXIX.

The Kols do not admit that they are abandoning their tribal gods, or that they are accepting higher Hindu deities. As we have seen, they know very little of these higher deities other than their name, but feel that they have always known them. The actual worship of the [777] Kol centres around the more primitive type of animistic ideology, modified, no doubt, by years of contact with other groups.

[177] There is a real question whether the word "Hinduization" is really an accurate one to describe the process. The movement is not a one-way process. Mundas are becoming "Hinduized", but Hinduism itself owes much to more primitive religions for it has constantly borrowed from them and unconsciously absorbed many of their concepts and practices. The religious life of the Kol is much akin to the villager who calls himself a Hindu. Yet both are very unlike the "Aryan religion". For example, is the burning of the dead a Munda or a Hindu phenomenon? Generally it is thought of as a Hindu way of disposing of the dead, and it is overlooked that some Hindu sects bury their dead. But the earliest accounts of the Mundas show that they, too, did both.

CONCLUDING REMARKS. The Kols of today have been strongly influenced by Hinduism, but seemingly have not come much into contact with other faiths. It has been noted that they are found

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among the most illiterate of the land. Up till now Christian Missions have started no work among them and there has been no attempt from any quarter to give them adequate facilities and opportunities whereby they may make some cultural advancement. There is great need for the improvement of their social and economic environment. 177 [797]

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the Kols are in- different or that their aspirations are dormant. There are stirrings among them, which, unfortunately, have been taken advantage of by unscrupulous people. They are seeking for religious recognition, and we have traced two attempts, one near Jubbulpore, and the other near Katni, to erect Kol "temples". In both cases wide appeals were circulated and fairly large sums of money collected. In the first case not a single stone was laid and some thousands of rupees were swindled. Near Katni they had got as far as the foundation and plinth when the funds gave out.¹ We were accompanied by five Kols to this project about which they were very enthusiastic. Our interest in it stimulated them greatly. They complained that nobody cared for Kols and that Hindus thought of them as coolies who had no self-respect; so they wanted to show the world that they are really worthy of recognition. They were very self-conscious about this matter. It was said that if they can only reveal their real spirit and show that they are truly interested in religious things, then Hindus must respect them and no longer despise them. They showed a pathetic eagerness for this recognition and were pleased with our visit. They made the claim that so far, not one person outside their own community, had shown the least concern for their welfare, and that in spite of their conscientious and earnest work, no one recognized nor knew them. 177 186 771

As a tribe the Kols are self-respecting and industrious. They are cheerful in disposition and greatly enjoy social fellowship. We found them open-hearted and ready to answer questions when once their confidence had been gained. Like most primitive tribes they are honest and trustworthy. That they have deep emotional feelings can be seen from their music and songs. They enjoy nothing better than a long evening of song and drum. We found but little evidence of their disobedience to the rules of the tribal codes of morality. 181 [152 533]

Taken all in all the Kols are a lovable people and as one comes into intimate contact with them he feels that much ought to be done to alleviate many of the difficulties and handicaps under which they bravely carry on.

In their case it is difficult to make recommendations for the future. For years Kols have been gradually losing their identity as an 000

¹ See plate XXVIII.